

## Looking Forward by OTTSTF

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**Genre:** F/M, Father-Daughter Relationship, Fluff

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Mike Wheeler

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper & Mike Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair

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**Summary:**

A new series! Starts two days after the Snow Ball, and will continue as far as I can write.

Begins with a feels trip shared amongst the Hopper family and Mike, followed by the all-important name decision.

# 1. News and Feelings

## Author's Note:

So I'm kinda thinking of this as a replacement for [Stranger Connections](#). I have a few reasons, but mainly because I just wanted to retry writing some of the moments in that whilst still forming a large story out of it.

I can only hope this new series does well. Every kudo and comment means the absolute world to a writer, so if you enjoy what you read, please do let me know that!

Chief Jim Hopper would never tell this to anyone, but upon receiving El-Jane's birth certificate, under *his* name, he'd barely managed to hold back tears. Looking after the girl for a year had forged a connection between them in his eyes – he hopes that she feels the same way – a connection he's not felt since Sara's passing: a feeling of responsibility, the need to protect her with his life (even if she's the strongest out of them both, *by far*), but most importantly, he'd developed a fatherly love for the girl not long after taking her in, which only grew as the months ticked by.

He'd always felt bad for keeping her away from her friends (*Mike*), but he'd never felt brave enough to risk outing her. He's sure, with some effort, and a damn good talk with the Wheeler kid, something *could* have been arranged, but he could never push himself to do it. Now that they've reunited, and after the Snow Ball, the happiness on her face just makes him feel even worse for delaying it, even if her happiness is contagious.

*That* is why he'd arranged to pick the Wheeler kid up at 15:30 today. As excited as he is, for some reason he's not too sure of (okay, he wants to watch both of their faces at the same time, but *again*, don't tell anybody), he wants Mike to be the one to break the news of *Jane* Hopper's official adoption (or at least, he be here when Jim himself does so).

He'd arranged it on the night of the Snow Ball, ensuring nobody else was close to hear. Under the circumstance that *nobody* knows that he's meeting him (except for Joyce and Nancy, who he trusts to aid in a cover story). Not even the kid himself knows why they're meeting, although Jim's damn well sure the kid will at least be hoping it's to do with El.

And that's the story of how Jim has ended up here: getting ready to pick Wheeler up in half an hour. He doesn't want to be late – *not any more*. He's let El down too many times; he doesn't want to do so ever again (even if she has no idea that he's bringing Mike home).

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His leg is bouncing absent-mindedly, as it always does when Michael Wheeler is excited, anxious, or nervous; right now he's a perfect mix of all three. Five minutes until the chief of police is supposed to arrive at their designated meet-up location (under strict rules that nobody is to know of this meet-up, being picked up from his house was obviously out of the question).

They're making this so secretive that Mike himself has no idea what this meet up is for, or how long it's supposed to go on for. Part of Mike thinks it may be to lay the terms and conditions onto him in regards to keeping his mouth shut when it comes to last month's events, which, *hello*, he's never tell anyone *anyway*.

But another part of him, deep down, really hopes that it's to do with El. He has mixed feelings; he's not sure how the chief will want to go about things regarding him and El now, but he seriously hopes he'll allow them to see each-other again. Even if it's once a month, *something* is better than *nothing*.

He's snapped out of his thoughts as he hears tyres rolling towards

him. Looking in the direction of the sound, he finds the chief's truck approaching, coming to a stop beside him, greeted by Hopper patting the front passenger seat. (Mike would've climbed into the back, although thinking about it, he doesn't really want to look like he'd been arrested, so perhaps the front seat is a good idea.

Closing the door behind himself, he nervously looks to the chief sat beside him.

"Hello sir."

"Michael." he nods his head in greeting.

"First things first, from now on, you can call me Jim."

Mike internally cringes at the confused expression on his own face, not wanting to seem disrespectful.

"Um... are you sure?" he asks, sounding just as confused as he looks.

Hopper smirks, holding back a small huff of laughter.

"Yes, I'm sure."

Mike nods his head, fixing his gaze back to the chief – *Jim* – once again.

"Why?" he hopes he doesn't sound disrespectful asking like that.

At this, Jim's smirk just grows. *A smile looks good on you*, Mike thinks to himself.

"Well, after everything we've been through, now I've seen – *really seen* how you are regarding El, I have a lot of new-found respect for you, Michael."

Mike smiles through the confusion that he still feels strongly.

"Uh, thanks, I guess." he responds. "I feel the same way for you, I guess."

"I'm glad, kid." he finishes, before pressing his foot onto the clutch and setting the truck into gear.

"Anyway, let's get moving."

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Pulling up to a dead end directly opposite the woods: To say Mike is nervous would be an understatement.

“You’re not planning on getting rid of me, are you?” Mike asks sarcastically.

Jim laughs. “Not in *that* manner, no, unless you give me a reason to start cleaning my gun in a dramatic manner, which I could never imagine you doing.”

Mike’s eyebrows raise, furrow, and raise again in a matter of seconds. The only time he’s heard the cliché ‘clean guns in your presence’ talk is...

“*Oh my god.*” slips out of his mouth without his consent. His face warms up quicker than the electronic heaters used to exorcise Will, but the smile on his face... *well.*

Jim fails, *really fails*, to hold back his laughter. *I’m going to enjoy doing that to you for the rest of your life*, he thinks to himself.

“You’re... taking me to your place?” Mike finally asks as Jim’s laughter tones down. He can’t quite believe he’s really here, about to see El, only *two* days after the Snow Ball. He’d expected it to take months, *maybe another three-hundred and fifty-three days*, before he’d get to see El again, after really thinking about Jim’s reasons for hiding her, coming to an understanding. He’ll always have a lingering anger inside him over that; *I would’ve kept my mouth shut, I could’ve helped her through the wait*, he thinks to himself, but his stronger feeling towards Jim now is thankfulness: he’d taken her in as soon as she revealed herself to him, made her a home, and treated her like his own. If anything, Mike now wants to believe that he owns Jim his life, knowing he can’t possibly thank him enough for what he’d done for El.

“That I am, kiddo.” he answers, stepping out of the driver’s seat;

Mike following suit, before beginning their journey towards the cabin. “I can’t bare to keep you two apart any more – you don’t deserve it. Just short of a year, you calling out and her listening, *every – single – day*, and then the way you lashed out on me at the Byers?...”

Mike cringes at the memory. Hopper places a comforting hand on his shoulder, snapping Mike’s gaze back to him immediately.

“...*Really* shows how much you care, how much you *need* her, might I say.” he finishes, removing the hand.

“You may.” Mike responds. “Because I don’t think I’d make it very far without her.”

Jim hums a laugh. “Let’s be truthful here: None of us would make it very far without her to save our asses.”

Mike hums a longer laugh in response. “God, ain’t that the truth .” he answers, holding his smirk, which falls a few seconds later.

“God, I hope she doesn’t end up having to do so ever again.”

Jim nods his head. “I’d love to believe it possible, kid; but we both know that *thing* is still out there.”

“Yeah.” Mike sighs. “I just hope it has no way of opening gates itself.”

“I’m with you on that, buddy.” Jim ends, finishing that conversation, which they’re both glad of. Mike notices the use of ‘*buddy*’, which he never thought he’s hear the chief of police utter in his life, but pays it no further attention.

As Mike catches glimpse of the cabin, his smile grows, near enough infinitely. It looks nice, *really* nice. *Pretty good*, he hears both his and El’s voice in his head at the same time, only forcing the smile on his face to grow further, somehow.

“Thank you.” He eventually gets out, looking up to the man at his side. “For bringing me here.”

Jim smiles, nodding his head. "Don't mention it, kid. It's a weight off my back, too."

Mike just smiles and nods his head back, barely able to contain the excitement building inside of him.

"Right, listen carefully." Jim begins, placing a hand on Mike's shoulder to halt him in his tracks, who then turns to provide his full attention.

"She's not expecting you, and if you get this wrong... hell, she might fling you into the moon or something."

Mike smirks, knowing she most likely is capable of doing exactly that.

"We've got a Morse code knock. Pay attention:" he takes Mike's right hand, opening it and holding it out, palm upwards.

"Twice... once... thrice." he says as he taps the knock on the hand he holds. He then holds his hand out as he'd held Mike's, silently ordering a repeat.

"Twice... once... thrice." Mike repeats, also tapping the code onto Jim's hand.

"Us?" Mike translates the Morse code with ease, causing an eye roll from Jim.

"Trust *you* to know that." he jokes, which plants a smile onto Mike's face once again.

"I'm in an A/V club..." Mike reminds the man as if it should be common knowledge.

"*That* doesn't surprise me either."

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El hears their shared knock, announcing the return of Hopper. Barely thinking about it, she slides the locks open immediately, not looking away from the TV.

She observes the man open the door in the corner of her eye, walking in shortly after. She finds it odd as he turns around, waving his head slightly, as if he'd suddenly developed powers like hers and was now throwing things around himself.

She notices another form make its way slowly through the door, and even through the corner of her eye, *that hair* stands out like an object in her void.

Her head flings to their direction faster than what should be humanly possible, as she practically flings herself off the sofa at the same time.

"Mike!?" she nearly screams, which in any normal situation would cause Jim to cringe in panic; but as of right now, the happiness that leaks from both of these kids in front of him is *far* too strong.

"El!" Mike just about manages to exclaim back, before nearly being winded by the impact of El slamming herself against him to squeeze him tight enough to strangle, which he doesn't mind in the slightest, as he returns said embrace.

El hums loudly in delight as she feels Mike's arms find their way around her. Jim can barely handle the utter adorableness, and so he creeps his way to the kitchen area, preparing drinks – *and an eggo or two* – for each of them.

He overhears their relatively simple conversation emerging from behind him, consisting mostly of "I missed you"s, despite only seeing each-other two days ago.

El notices how Mike's eyes keep glancing around her face, as if tracing the curve of her mop of curls around her head. She realises he's never seen her hair in its natural state.

"Still pretty?" she smiles, remembering the way he'd still thought her



so despite the lack of hair.

He smiles back. “*Gorgeous.*” he decides a new word is in order for *this* version of El. *Pretty* when short (or blonde). *Bitchin’* when set up in all dark clothes and make-up, *beautiful* in her Snow Ball style, but here, in a basic set up of blue jeans and a grey t-shirt with red stripes, and the curliest hair he’s ever seen, she is, without a second thought...

“Absolutely gorgeous.” he amends, having submerged a hand into the curls at some point out of pure curiosity.

“I know I said you didn’t need it, and I still stick by that; you’d still look perfect if it were short. But back then, it didn’t even really occur to me that it’d grow, and even if it did, I never would’ve guessed it’d be so curly.”

They’re both smirking, El blushing pretty bad as she ducks her head with the same smile she’d worn when he’d called her *beautiful*.

“You too.” she says as she raises her head to look back into his eyes. She raises a hand to his hair, imitating the way he’d buried his hands in her curls. Rolling a strand around her finger, she remembers the word she’s looking for.

“Still handsome.” she smirks.

He imitates her response perfectly, ducking his head with a smile, and cheeks redder than Rudolph’s nose. They remain quiet for a moment, just taking in the sight of the other, willing to stay standing here for the rest of their lives.

“I can’t believe he’s let me come here.” Mike whispers to her, glancing over to Jim.

So he follows his glance. “Me too. But I’m happy he has.”

“Me too.” Mike smiles. “So happy.”

Their voices fall silent; Jim’s just about to turn around, but he’s held in place suddenly, by two pairs of arms trapping him tightly – the person on his left placing their head against his side, thereby

informing him of who's who.

"Jesus!" he exclaims through a laugh. "Give a man some heads up!"

"Nope." El denies. "Your reaction is funny."

Jim laughs once again. "Oh, I bet it is!" he ruffles her hair, which causes her to release her hold to swat his hand away. Mike, however, doesn't move a muscle.

"Oh, you think you're immune to a bit of hair-ruining, do you?" he questions the boy as he moves his other hand to his head. He's returned with a near-perfect imitation of El's reaction, which earns a smirk from Jim.

"Anyway." Jim picks up his mug and plate. "Grab yourselves a mug and plate and take a seat; there's something I want to show you both." He barely holds back the large smile threatening to break free as he thinks of it.

Glancing to each-other with a raised eyebrow each, Mike shrugs, allowing El to take his hand as they both take seats (El now realising why a third chair showed up at *some point* she doesn't recall).

Taking their seats, they observe Jim reach into a pocket of his coat, before returning to the table with a plain white envelope. He hands it to Mike, failing miserably to keep the huge smirk off his face.

Keeping his gaze on Jim for a moment, confused as of why he's smiling so hard, Mike eventually lets his gaze fall upon the envelope. He examines the other side for any labels, finding nothing, before he slips two fingers and a thumb inside, pinching the thin piece of card inside.

The first thing Mike notices are names. He's not aware of any one with *those* names, he thinks as he observes two of them. He scans the paper once, twice, three more times, nearly intending to ask who this is for, and why he's showing it to him.

But suddenly, something in his head clicks. The card slips from his fingers; his hands not moving an inch as his gaze remains on the card, which now lay upright on the table.

“What is it, Mike?” El asks, somewhat worried over his reaction.

Mike lets his eyes land on hers, but he says nothing – he’s completely unable to. He lingers on El for a moment, before looking up to Hopper.

“Is...” he points to the card, then to El, failing to speak any further.

Jim’s smile increases, a lot, as he nods his head. Mike looks back to El, who now looks confused instead of concerned. The thought to blink back the tears which begin to fall from his eyes doesn’t occur to him as he feels his smile grow painfully large for the second time today.

*He’s crying, but he’s smiling,* El observes Mike’s face as he returns to staring into her eyes. She wants to ask him again, feeling desperate to know how on Earth a piece of card as small as that could crumble Mike so easily.

She’s not left waiting for long, as Mike slowly slides the card over to her with a slightly shaking hand. She takes it, letting her eyes scan the page thoroughly. She too finds herself noticing the names on the page first: *Jane Hopper, child of Teresa Ives and Jim Hopper.*

She’s confused for a moment, wondering how and why a birth certificate would have such details on it, before she quickly – and suddenly – remembers a word she’d heard a few times on TV: *adoption.*

She immediately snaps her gaze to Jim as the realisation hits her; *She’s now Jane Hopper, and he is now her official father, whilst still keeping a connection to her real mother.*

She’s soon in a similar state as Mike, smiling stupidly with tears running down her cheeks.

“How did you...” she begins to ask, stalling three words in as she lets her gaze land on the birth certificate again.

“Doc. Owens.” he answers the question. “I’ve no idea how, but it’s his work.”

“Doc. Owens... the man we helped from the lab.” she recalls.

Mike's brain suddenly catches up with the words being spoken, snapping him out of his shock-induced near-comatose state.

"Doc. Owens? *He* made this happen?"

Jim nods his head. "Man of magic, as far as I'm now concerned."

Mike's smile slowly returns, nodding his head.

"I... was never really sure about him. Will would tell me about every visit, telling me all about the doctors and what they'd had him do. He seemed... different... *better* than the rest of them, but I was never sure. Now..."

Jim nods his head. "Likewise, kid. Sometimes he'd make it look like an act; sometimes his attitude towards things would piss me right off, but now I feel like I should be spit-cleaning his shoes by the hour."

Mike hums a laugh, which causes El to smile. She's not sure why someone would want their shoes cleaned with *spit*, but it sounds like it'd take quite a long time to do.

"This... this is freaking awesome." Mike declares, his gaze dancing between the two others.

"Thank you. Thank you, so, so much, for everything you've done for her."

Jim's smile stretches further. "Don't mention it, Wheeler."

"No, I *need* to. I should've said it a long time ago. I feel like I should be on my knees cleaning *your* shoes this very second."

He hums a laugh. "Well you're always welcome to." he jokes. Mike raises his eyebrow, lifting himself from his chair.

"Sit down, I'm joking."

Mike smirks, having been playing along with the joke.

"I'm serious though, sir."

"*Jim.*"

"If you ever need an extra pair of hands or some errands run, you give me a shout, because no matter what I do, I'll never feel like I've paid you back enough."

“Michael, you owe me nothing. You want to know why?”

“Know what?” he asks with a curious expression.

He sits down on the chair at the side of the table, between the two of them.

“The day she trusted me enough to reveal herself, the day I brought her here...” his smile grows, his bottom lip actually trembling slightly; completely out-of-character as far as anyone else has ever seen.

“That day... that day was the best day of my life.”

Both El and Mike glance at each-other with smiles on their faces as they hear Jim’s words.

“The days we spent making this little thing our home,” he glances around, taking in the cabin.

“those are days I’ll never forget. The first time she’d warmed both our dinners for me to come to, so we could eat together?”

They observe a tear rolling down his cheek. *There’s a first time for quite literally everything*, Mike smirks.

“That night, I had to punch a wall to feel like a man again.”

A huff of laughter from Mike, a giggle from El; both of them joining the man, producing tears as they hear him do the one thing he thought he’d never do ever again in his life: confess his feelings.

“She saved me. Not from monsters, or another dimension. She saved me from the deep decline I’d been falling into... She made life worth living again. Having something to work for, something to come home to every day, someone to greet me in the morning, and as I get home from work, always with the most infectious smile I’ve ever seen...”

Now all of their smiles are stupidly big, eyes stinging, cheeks becoming more drenched by the second.

“Jesus Christ, El, look at what you’ve done to me.” Jim laughs, followed by small huffed laughs from the two others.

El can't help but feel overwhelmed by her new father's speech; they may have been living together for near enough a year now, but she will never quite get used to being treated like a real daughter. The feeling of being loved by your parents should be something every child grows up with, but she'd grown up instead thought of as equipment, designed to spy on other countries '*for the benefit of the United States*' they'd told her time and time again. Whenever she wouldn't, or even if she *couldn't* perform to their stressing, always painful standards, they'd lock her away in the cold for what she can only assume would be an entire night, before forcing the same task on her again the next day.

Life was simple, but horrific: Stress herself beyond her own limits, no matter how much blood she'd lose or how painful her head feels after it, or be punished like a dog that had torn up every piece of furniture in the house.

"Getting out of the lab... living with Mike for a week, then living here with you... it's all been so amazing. Thank you, both of you." she says through her watery smile.

"And you, El." Mike doesn't hesitate to follow. "Meeting you was the best day of my life, too. Not because of the superpowers or anything like that, but because of *who you are*. You showed me who *I* am."

His hands start reaching towards hers before he realises it. She notices, however, and reaches for them herself, too, taking them and intertwining their fingers. He smiles at the gesture immediately, his eyes never leaving hers.

"It's actually pretty funny now I think about it. It was in the gym that you'd first leaned your head on my shoulder, which was when I realised that..."

He looks to Hopper, who's already smirking as if he knows what Mike is about to confess.

"It was then that I realised Nancy was right. I do *really* like you, El. It was in the gym that I'd starting trying to build the courage to admit that to you; and then the Snow Ball came to mind, and I was so stupidly happy when you'd agreed to it, despite not knowing what it was."

She smirks; two days ago, dancing with Mike, holding each-other close, leaning against him on the benches just like the day Mike's talking about... *their kiss*... it will never be surpassed as the best day of her life. That, she is sure of.

"Then, the second you disappeared, I knew I'd never be the same again, but I'd need to act like it. And oh *man* did I fail. It was horrible, not knowing. *But*, then the day at the Byers' house rolled along, and despite the circumstances, you storming through the door like the superhero you are..."

She giggles, stretching his smile further.

"And then we *actually went* to the Snow Ball. I didn't even know you were going to show up, I assumed you'd forgotten about it. It was only because Will had kept encouraging me to go that I did. He'd kept insisting that you would show up, and even though I really didn't believe that, I gave in. I was sitting there like such a downer, seeing Lucas and Will dancing, with me still thinking you'd never show up, and there's nobody else I'd ever want to dance with. Then, against all my expectations, you appear, and oh my god, my eyes had never laid on anything more beautiful."

Mike doesn't care at all that Jim's probably having to hold back laughter, or an eye roll at his words, as she ducks her head with a blushed smile again.

"And that's what makes it so perfect. I realise my feelings for you in the gym, and now *Jim* is the one making this possible."

They both smirk at his connection, but El can't help but focus on Mike's confession of his feelings for her. She'd known about it, since the first time he'd rushed a shy kiss, but to hear him describe it, and to learn that he shares essentially all the exact same thoughts and feelings that she does, and she couldn't be happier. This day just got added to her list of favourite days, tucked right under the Snow Ball.

She stands up, taking the few steps required to be at Jim's side, before leaning down to place a quick kiss on his cheek.

"Thank you, *Dad*." she says, leaning back up. The smile on his face as

she uses that word for the first time is one she'll never forget. She then looks to Mike, moving to his side as she smiles even more. Leaning down, she connects their lips without a second thought. Mike tenses, which El knows is because of Hopper's presence, but she doesn't care. It's longer than a peck, but she doesn't push her luck; no need to warrant a clearing of *someone's* throat, she thinks. His face is hilarious as she pulls back; a mix of shock and shyness showing through the smile that finds itself growing despite Jim's presence.

The man in question then stands, shaking his head but smiling nonetheless.

"Thank god I'm heading back to work."

Mike's face suddenly sinks. "We can't stay any longer?"

Hopper smirks again. "I said *I'm* going to work, Wheeler."

Mike's eyes widen in surprise. "You're... letting me stay here? While you're gone?"

"Assuming you can behave yourselves." the man says with a raised eyebrow.

"Sir!" he blurts out, his cheeks red in an instant, whilst El simply looks confused.

Jim laughs, throwing his coat over his shoulders. "That's never going to get old."

Mike rolls his eyes. "Great, now I've got you tormenting me too."

"You're damn right." he smirks, looking forward to every single chance he gets to heat those cheeks up.

"I finish at seven. Meet me where we parked no later than half-past. Any later, and I'll be knocking that door down with my gun ready."

Mike's eyes roll again. "You won't need to do that. You have my word."

"Good man." he says, patting them both on their shoulders, and attempting to ruffle El's hair, but having no luck as she backs away before he even moves his hand. He smirks at oh-so-typical reaction,



*she's looking more like a typical teenager by the day*, he finds himself realising many, many times.

He then opens the door, stepping out onto the porch.

“See you later, Dad!” El calls behind him.

He turns back, the signature smile which that word will always produce immediately on his face.

“See you later, *my girl*.”

He closes the door behind him, El making the bolts look automated as she locks them near enough immediately after. Her and Mike watch him shrink into the distance through the window right until he's out of sight, before they turn to each-other in unison.

“What now?” Mike asks her.

“TV?” she suggests.

He nods his head, smiling. “Sounds like the perfect day to me.”

## 2. Names

About five minutes into their TV watching, Mike suddenly remembers something he'd meant to ask as soon as the all-important card was revealed. It'd left his mind thanks to the whole feel-trip they all found themselves boarding, but now things have settled, he suddenly remembers.

"Oh, crap! I completely forgot to ask you!"

El immediately lowers the TV's volume without a twitch of a single muscle, giving Mike her full attention.

"What were you going to ask?"

"Well, about your name."

"Jane?"

"Yeah. I was meant to ask if you wanted to be called that now. Y'know, instead of El."

Her face turns to that of ponder. "I... I'm not sure." she admits.

"That's okay! You don't need to decide straight away." he says, hoping to reassure her.

She nods her head. "I like both. Jane, my Mama gave me, and now *Dad* has given me back. Jane's my real name now."

Mike nods his head. "Oh, yeah, we'll have to call you Jane in front of anyone else, like, when you're finally able to go out and all, unless we figure out a way to keep using El as some kind of nickname."

She smiles slightly. " They gave me Jane, b ut *you* gave me El."

"... Short for Eleven."

"But I've never thought of it that way. To me, El is a name of its own. Not related to Eleven, or the lab. You gave it to me with a choice. '*Maybe* we can call you El?' you said. You didn't force it on me, you were the first person to ever let me choose, so I never want to lose

it.”

He smiles at her words. Never did he think that simple gesture would have such an impact, let alone as such an emotional part of her decision now.

“I know what I want.” she says, nodding her head. “I want El.”

Mike nods with a smile. “It can be part of a middle name, maybe.”

“Eleanor?” she immediately suggests.

Mike laughs slightly. “Yeah. Jane Eleanor Hopper.”

“I like it.” she smiles.

“Me too. It has a nice ring to it.”

“I think so too. Thank you, Mike.” she says, leaning her head on his shoulder.

“It’s my pleasure, El.” he responds, leaning his head against the top of hers.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Apologies for the miniscule length!

### 3. Deal

All too quickly, they find 19:15 screaming at them from Mike's watch, ordering him to prepare himself for meeting Jim to be taken home.

"Woah, that went quick." Mike looks upon the numbers after silencing the beeps.

"Too quick." El frowns. "I wish you could stay."

"So do I, El. But we can't risk my parents asking questions. They don't know where I am; I didn't even tell them I was going out."

"Why?" she wears the same old curious face that Mike finds himself unable to resist sharing the world's secrets to.

"Well, Dad would probably never notice any of us missing; he's too busy either sleeping, watching sports or finding new ways to praise the government to pay attention to any of us. Mom, she's still trying, I can give her that. But she's gotten so dependant on her wine now that sometimes I think she's going to end up just like Dad."

She's frowning again, sad to hear that any parents would dismiss their children in such ways. From what she'd seen of the Wheeler household when she'd browsed, they looked like the perfect happy family; one where every member loved each-other unconditionally, no matter the circumstances.

"Maybe you should talk to her." she begins, hoping he understands her point of view.

"Mom?"

"Yes. I know we don't like talking about it, but when you were calling out to me, I could see how you didn't want to speak to anybody else, even your mama. Maybe, now that we're okay, we can see each-other, maybe you should try talking to her, to see if you can help."

Mike reflects on her words for a moment, remembering how bad he

had been at the worst stages of his 'Post-El depression' as he'd overheard Lucas call it sometimes. The other two would never call it that; Dustin holding on to a shimmer of hope, Will not knowing enough to feel confident to comment.

But most importantly, he remembers the way he lashed out sometimes. Never did his mother see the worst of it, but perhaps El is right. Perhaps trying to get back into proper talks with her could do them both a good.

"You know, El, I think you're right. I will try that, whenever the time feels right. Thank you."

She smiles strong, feeling great that she can still help Mike even though issues such as these.

"I still wish I could hang around for a bit longer, though."

"I wish you could stay forever." she tells him through a smirk.

He huffs a laugh. "That would be amazing."

He takes the hand which she holds out to him while standing next to the door, before they begin their slow walk towards where Hopper should be waiting for them.

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"I just think it'll seem ungrateful, asking to stay longer." are the first words Jim can make out as he hears them approaching the car. *Of course she's with him*, is his first thought, followed by *of course four hours isn't enough for them*.

"Let me ask him, then." her voice responds.

And with that, there's a knocking on his car window. He looks to it, acting as if he'd heard nothing.

“Hey kiddos.”

“Hey Dad.”

“Hey, Jim.” Mike says awkwardly, unable to get used to first-name terms with the man. It puts a smile onto the man’s face, though, so he feels reassured.

“Wheeler, I’ve got a deal for you.” he quickly butts himself back in, purposely preventing El’s ‘question’. He begins climbing out of the car.

“What is it, sir?” his eyes perk up at the sound of a ‘deal’.

“Can you swear to keep your mouth shut about seeing her, even to your little group?”

He glances between El, wondering where this could be going.

“If I must, I swear.”

The man nods his head. “Can you swear to never disclose the location of the cabin to *anyone*?”

“Oh god, of course! I would never tell any of them that.”

He nods his head again. “And can you swear to keep your visits inconspicuous? Take a different path each time, make sure you’re never followed.”

“Of course! At the first sign of trouble, I turn back, without making it too obvious.”

He pats Mike on the shoulder. “In that case, you can teach her how to use *this* later.” he passes a brand-new SuperCom to El, who’s eyes shoot open immediately.

“You got her a SuperCom!?” Mike’s voice raises with excitement, eyeballing the packaging.

“That I did. You’re to call her by Jane over it, no matter the circumstances. You can tell the others I told you that at some point. Make sure they know to call her Jane as well. I don’t want any slip-

ups.”

“Absolutely, sir! I’ll be strict about that.”

The man nods his head again, but El remembers a particular word he’d used.

“Later?”

“Huh?” they both question, nearly in unison.

“You said Mike can teach me... later.” she reminds them.

“Ah, so I did. Well, work had me thinking, I guess. And, today being such a special day, I think it’s worth a bit of celebrating. So, I’m going to drop Wheeler off, he’s going to collect what he needs for the night, and then he can stay.”

“I can stay!?”

“He can stay!?”

They both practically shout at the same time. The man nods his head, followed by El practically diving onto him with a hug.

“But what about my parents?” Mike asks.

“Michael, everything’s sorted. Mrs. Byers is covering for you. Nancy’s got your stuff ready in the basement.

“Mrs. Byers? Nancy? They know about this? And Nancy’s... helping?”

“A big sister can be a good thing sometimes, Wheeler. Now hop in, we haven’t got all night.”

El immediately hops in the back, followed by Mike. Jim glances at their connected hands, and can’t help but roll his eyes.

“You’re not going to the house with him, kid. You’re still supposed to be staying low.”

“Staying low.” she reassures. “I will stay hidden in here.”

“Good girl.” he smiles with a nod, before starting the truck’s engine.

## 4. Amazing

### Notes for the Chapter:

Apologies for the delay!

Writer's block is pretty much permanent for me, so it's a miracle whenever I think of something to update any of my stories.

Thanks so much for sticking with me despite this! ♥

"This one controls the volume. If it's all the way to the left, it's off. You don't want to have it too high, because that'll drain the batteries, and it's *really* loud anyway. I usually have it about here." he says, turning the volume knob of the SuperCom.

"I just leave this one all the way down." he says, indicating to the 'squelch' knob.

"We usually stick to this channel, and then you hold this down when you want to talk."

"Can I try now?" she asks, ready to press the 'talk' button.

"I don't think that's a good idea." he rushes out, quickly needing to amend as he sees her frown.

"Not yet, anyway. They don't know that they need to call you Jane yet, so if we try calling them now they'll probably blurt out 'El' instead."

She realises his point, and nods.

"And, they could get suspicious of how I know you have one. We don't want them knowing I'm here, not yet anyway."

She nods again. "Another time."

She raises from the sofa, holding Mike's hand to drag him with her. Hopper observes as she drags him into her bedroom, but doesn't say anything of it as the door's left open. Besides, it's not like he really needs to worry about these two, *yet, at least*; Mike's a good kid.



Mike glances around her bedroom as El places her new SuperCom beside her bed. Her bedroom is very simplistic, but also quite nice. The whole style of this cabin is very homely, Mike's observed, and this bedroom, with its simplistic set up and small size, is very nice, in his opinion.

His attention is drawn to the only two pictures hung on the wall directly above where her head would lay: one of the entire party, and one of just her and Mike, both taken two days ago at the Snow Ball. The latter picture plants a smile onto Mike's face with ease.

"Jonathan got those developed quick, didn't he?" Mike says, trying to hide his evident preference of their lone picture.

"I begged him." she says, quoting Jonathan's word. "A bit too much, he said."

Mike laughs at that. "I can't wait to get mine." he says, knowing full well they'd be just as proudly displayed as her copies.

She smiles. "Which is your favourite?"

*Of course she'd ask that, Mike thinks. Oh, to hell with it.*  
"Ours." he says after a moment. "Just us."

She smiles more. "Mine too."

Mike turns his head to her as he feels her hand take his once again. "Why?" she asks.

*Crap.* He wasn't expecting that.

He visibly struggles for a moment, but eventually, he begins voicing his reasons.

"I guess... because it's the first ever photo of you. It means you're finally getting to live a normal life. And... *well*, best of all, it's a permanent representation of *us*. Me and you, captured forever."

She smiles greatly, whilst Mike blushes slightly as his brain catches up with what he'd just said.

"Us. Together, forever. In photo, and for real." she states through her

large smile.

“Forever.” he agrees, squeezing her hand slightly.

She suddenly remembers the calls Mike had made to her. Day one-hundred, to be specific.

*‘Hi El. Day one-hundred. God, I can’t believe I’m saying that. It still feels like yesterday that I met you.’*

*‘No matter how long it takes, how long I’m calling, I’ll never give up on you El. I’ll call out to you forever, until the day we meet again, because I know, for a fact, some day, we will.’*

“We’ve finally met again.” she tells him. “Three-hundred and fifty-three days.”

Mike smiles despite the memory. “I still can’t believe you were listening.”

She nods. “Every night, since the first I heard.”

Mike smiles, suddenly feeling slightly hopeful as he remembers something.

“Day thirty-eight?” he asks.

Her eyebrows raise. “How do you know?”

He raises a hand to her cheek, exactly as he *hopes* she did on that day in the void.

“It was the first day I felt you listening. A cold touch to my cheek, just like this.”

Her smile grows large. “You felt it...”

“A lot, yeah. Sometimes it was like I could see you. Sometimes I heard you, and sometimes I could feel you.”

She reaches her hand up to his cheek, continuing to smile. She turns her head slowly towards her bedroom door.

“I just wish he’d let me tell you, for real.” she says, turning back to Mike.

Mike nods. “I wish so too, but I’m not mad any more. He was just trying to keep you safe.”

She nods her head. “We’re both learning.” she says, quoting the man.

Mike smiles, nodding. “You’re both doing great. And now he’s your dad, which is absolutely amazing.”

“Absolutely amazing.” she repeats with a smile.

“I agree!” Hopper blurts through the door, startling them both, before continuing on his way as he laughs.

### **Author's Note:**

Thank you for reading! Feedback is a writer's drug,  
so if you can spare the time to write a few words,  
please consider doing so!  
I love you all!